

**From the Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Michael McBride**



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

**HSS(MD)54/2020**

**FOR ACTION**

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health and Social  
Care Board/HSC Trusts/ NIAS

GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board

All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward  
distribution to practice staff)

OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)

**PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST**

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Our Ref: HSS(MD)54/2020

Date: 29 July 2020

Dear Colleagues

**PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND HEAT: RISK OF HEAT STRESS**

**Summary**

Please find attached (Tab A) relevant information on and appropriate actions to manage the risk of Heat Stress while wearing Personal Protective Equipment. I would ask that you circulate this information to relevant directorates in your organisation for their action.

**Background**

Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) in warm/hot environments increases the risk of heat stress. This occurs when the body is unable to cool itself enough to maintain a healthy temperature. Heat stress can cause heat exhaustion and lead to heat stroke if the person is unable to cool down.

Occupational heat strain is associated with productivity loss and has an impact on the health of those affected.

To reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, healthcare staff are now required to wear PPE, specified for different settings and activities in line with national guidance. This can effectively require them to wear PPE for the entirety of their clinical work.

Please be aware that a further increase in demand for certain PPE items during warmer months due to staff changing equipment more frequently may be likely.

Please give this matter your immediate attention

Yours sincerely



**Dr Michael McBride**  
**Chief Medical Officer**



**Professor Charlotte McArdle**  
**Chief Nursing Officer**

## ACTIONS TO REDUCE RISK OF HEAT STRESS

Note any actions taken must be aligned with local infection prevention and control policies.

- **Plan now for the summer high temperatures:**
  - Assess the risk of overheating in your workplace and consider appropriate control measures to implement.
  - Consider collective control measures first (e.g. remove or reduce the sources of heat where possible).
- **Ensure that staff are aware of the risk of heat stress when wearing PPE and know how to reduce their risk.**

Staff working in warm/hot conditions should:

- Take regular breaks.( NB managers should consider staffing level requirement to maintain service levels whilst accommodating increased staff breaks)
- Make sure you are hydrated (checking your urine is an easy way of keeping an eye on your hydration levels – dark or strong-smelling urine is a sign that you should drink more fluids).
- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of heat stress and dehydration (thirst, dry mouth, dark or strong-smelling urine, urinating infrequently or in small amounts, inability to concentrate, muscle cramps, fainting). Don't wait until you start to feel unwell before you take a break.
- Use a buddy system with your team to look out for the signs of heat stress (e.g. confusion, looking pale or clammy, fast breathing) in each other.
- Between shifts, try to stay cool as this will give your body a chance to recover

Further Information can be found at:

[https://www.cas.mhra.gov.uk/ViewandAcknowledgment/ViewAttachment.aspx?Attachment\\_id=103597](https://www.cas.mhra.gov.uk/ViewandAcknowledgment/ViewAttachment.aspx?Attachment_id=103597)

## Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)

Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency

Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Health and Social Care Board (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)

Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts

Director of Social Care and Children, HSCB

Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health and Social Care Board (*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)

Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultants, Occupational Health Physicians and School Medical Leads*)

Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses, and Midwives*)

Directors of Children’s Services, HSC Trusts

RQIA (*for onward transmission to all independent providers including independent hospitals*)

Medicines Management Pharmacists, HSC Board (*for cascade to prescribing advisers*)

Regional Medicines Information Service, Belfast HSC Trust

Regional Pharmaceutical Procurement Service, Northern HSC Trust

Professor Donna Fitzsimons, Head of School of Nursing and Midwifery QUB

Professor Sonja McIlfattrick, Head of School of Nursing, University of Ulster

Caroline Lee, CEC

Donna Gallagher, Open University

Professor Paul McCarron, Head of School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, UU

Professor Carmel Hughes, Head of School, School of Pharmacy, QUB

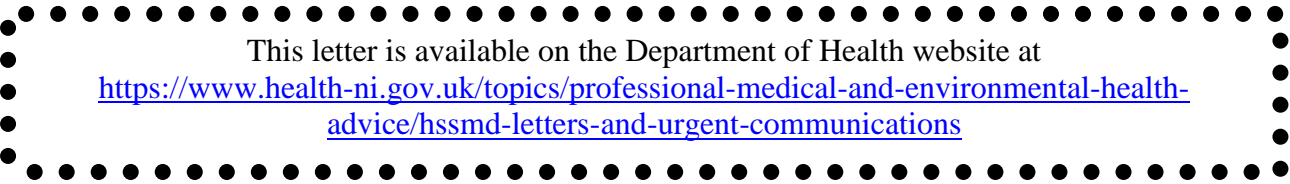
Professor Colin Adair, Director of the NI Centre for Pharmacy Learning and Development, QUB

Joe Brogan, Assistant Director of Integrated Care, HSCB

Michael Donaldson, HSCB (*for distribution to all General Dental Practitioners*)

Raymond Curran, Head of Ophthalmic Services, HSCB (*for distribution to Community Optometrists*)

Trade Union Side


 This letter is available on the Department of Health website at  
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>